

Equanimity is a state of mind that feels it is pointless to generate prejudice towards others, i.e. to discriminate between friend and enemy, or agreeable and disagreeable, and to act under the sway of attachment and anger. Therefore, practitioners who have developed this type of equanimity reduce the coarser forms of those undesirable responses, and once free from acting under their influence, gain some mental equilibrium.

Equanimity must precede meditation on the two principal techniques for generating Bodhicitta.

The two techniques are:

1. The Sevenfold Cause and Effect Instructions
2. Equalizing and Exchanging Self for Others

They were explained extensively during the presentation of **Bodhicitta** (the first topic of the first chapter of the *Ornament*).

Meditation on the two techniques for generating Bodhicitta helps practitioners to develop the other causal awarenesses that must precede Bodhicitta:

**Affectionate love:** a caring affection that finds *all* sentient beings endearing and feels close to them.

**Great compassion:** a caring attitude that wants *all* sentient beings to be free from suffering.

**The special attitude:** the wish to free all sentient beings from suffering by oneself.

**The aspiration to benefit others:** the intense wish for all sentient beings to attain enlightenment (which was explained on Handout 4)

Please note that it is subject to debate at what point practitioners newly cultivate the *aspiration to benefit others* - whether they cultivate it, for instance, before cultivating the altruistic attitude or afterwards.

Once Mahayana practitioners, that is, Bodhisattvas, have cultivated Bodhicitta and thus *entered* the path of accumulation, they need to accumulate sufficient merit and wisdom by engaging in the practice of the six perfections, etc. in order to be able to proceed. This is the reason for calling this path the 'path of accumulation'. However, that is merely the etymology of the first of the five paths and does not serve as its definition, since practitioners have to accumulate merit and wisdom on other paths, too.

As explained above, the first moment of the Mahayana path of accumulation is marked, by cultivating the first moment of Bodhicitta. With that first moment of Bodhicitta, practitioners not only enter the Mahayana path but also become Bodhisattvas.

Yet, only the first four of the five Mahayana paths are Bodhisattva paths, whereas the last path, the path of no-more-learning, is an omniscient mind and thus not a Bodhisattva's but a Buddha's path.

Furthermore, even though Bodhicitta is the criterion that determines whether practitioners are on the Mahayana path, this does not mean that Bodhicitta must always be present in their continua. At times - for example during deep sleep or when meditating on emptiness - Bodhicitta lies dormant; it exists in the form of a seed (i.e. a potency) and is not an active awareness. Nonetheless, even then it influences the physical, verbal, and mental actions of Mahayanists. Therefore, the scriptures explain that the factor that determines whether practitioners are Bodhisattvas is not whether Bodhicitta is present in their continua, but whether Bodhicitta "has been attained and has not deteriorated".

Also, Bodhicitta can be divided into (1) aspirational Bodhicitta and (2) engaging Bodhicitta.

The first moment of Bodhicitta on the path of accumulation refers to aspirational Bodhicitta, for it is Bodhicitta that is not conjoined with the Bodhisattva vow. Therefore, please note that aspirational Bodhicitta does not refer to the awareness that merely aspires to attain Bodhicitta but to actual Bodhicitta in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who has not yet received the Bodhisattva vow.

Engaging Bodhicitta, on the other hand, is Bodhicitta that is conjoined with the Bodhisattva vow, i.e. the mind of enlightenment present in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who has received the Bodhisattva vow and not transgressed it. Hence, Mahayana practitioners first cultivate Bodhicitta (aspirational Bodhicitta) and then receive the vow, thereby transforming their aspirational Bodhicitta into engaging Bodhicitta. The reason for this is that practitioners do not receive the Bodhisattva vow *before* generating Bodhicitta. They can only receive it when they are already Bodhisattvas.

The Mahayana path of accumulation consists of three levels:

- 1) The small Mahayana path of accumulation
- 2) The middling Mahayana path of accumulation

### 3) The great Mahayana path of accumulation

#### **The small Mahayana path of accumulation**

The following awarenesses are attained simultaneously: the first moment of the Mahayana path of accumulation, the first moment of Bodhicitta, and the first moment of the *small* Mahayana path of accumulation. The reason for this is that the first moment of Bodhicitta is both the first moment of the Mahayana path of accumulation and the first moment of the *small* Mahayana path of accumulation. Therefore, the criterion for entering the *small* Mahayana path of accumulation is Bodhicitta.

However, during the period of the small path of accumulation, Bodhicitta may still deteriorate and practitioners can lose the Mahayana path.

Regarding their practice, unless they had realized emptiness before they entered the path of accumulation, Bodhisattvas on this level must now reflect on the various reasons that establish the ultimate nature of reality, i.e. the emptiness of true existence, for they must *conceptually* realize emptiness at the latest on the *middling* Mahayana path of accumulation.

In addition to meditating on emptiness, practitioners also meditate on love, compassion, the six perfections, and so forth.

#### **The middling Mahayana path of accumulation**

On this level of the path of accumulation, Mahayanists attain “gold-like Bodhicitta”, i.e. Bodhicitta which has become so strong and stable that it cannot deteriorate anymore. Thus, once Bodhisattvas proceed to the middling Mahayana path of accumulation they can no longer lose the aspiration to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Additionally, unless they have already taken the Bodhisattva vow on the *small* path of accumulation, Bodhisattvas must take it at the latest on the middling path of accumulation. On this level of the path, there is no longer any transgression of the vow.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, unless they had realized emptiness before they cultivated Bodhicitta or when they were on the small Mahayana path of accumulation, Bodhisattvas have to realize emptiness at the latest on this level, for otherwise they are unable to move on to the next level.

Of the three categories of phenomena (manifest, slightly hidden, and very hidden), emptiness is a slightly hidden phenomenon and thus newly realized by an inferential cognizer. Inferential cognizers are conceptual consciousnesses that realize their hidden objects of engagement in dependence on correct reasons. An example for a correct reason that establishes emptiness is:

*The subject, the car, is empty of true existence because it is dependently arisen.*

Having reflected (during the *small* path of accumulation) on this correct reason as well as on numerous other reasons establishing the ultimate nature of phenomena, now Bodhisattvas newly generate an inferential cognizer that conceptually realizes the emptiness of true existence.

The *great* Mahayana path of accumulation is characterized by the attainment of a special meditative stability called “*Mental Stability of Continuous Dharma*” which will be explained below. Hence, in order to facilitate such attainment, Bodhisattvas on the *middling* level of the path of accumulation have to achieve a meditative stabilization, which is a union of calm abiding and special insight. In order to *newly* cultivate such a union practitioners take as the object of meditation a phenomenon that is not difficult to focus on, such as the inhalation and exhalation of the breath or the image of a Buddha, for at this stage, practitioners would be unable to focus on a hidden phenomenon such as emptiness, subtle impermanence, and so forth.

Please note that the attainment of the union of calm abiding and special insight must be preceded by developing calm abiding.

Calm abiding refers to an awareness that is able to focus single-pointedly and effortlessly on a particular object for at least four hours, and which is conjoined with a special mental pliancy as well as a special physical pliancy. Mental pliancy is a mental factor that makes the mind serviceable by pacifying the detrimental states that cause the awareness to be heavy and inflexible and prevent it from engaging in virtue at will. Physical pliancy is a mental factor that makes the body serviceable and pacifies physical heaviness and inflexibility.